

SUPRANATIONAL SYSTEMS AND CROSS-NATIONAL ONLINE COMMUNICATION IN  
WALLONIA AND QUEBEC

BY

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THESIS

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## Abstract

Positive ramifications of the integration of the European Union have been studied since the supranational institution was founded. In the twenty-first century, Europe has been faced with a migration crisis that has led to a rise in xenophobia, anti-immigration movements, and far-right parties. This research seeks to learn more about far-right party social media communication tactics in the EU, and how parties can benefit from the interconnected political geography that exists in the EU. In order to do this, this study compares the Facebook communication tactics of the EU example of Wallonia (Belgium) to a similar, non-EU example of Quebec (Canada). These two regions have many similarities and present themselves as great candidates to use the most-similar case design. 250 Facebook posts are analyzed from a far-right party in each of the two regions: *La Meute* from Wallonia and *Démocratie Nationale* from Quebec. Quantitative analysis provides some basic differences between the two groups. Critical discourse analysis is used to find deeper meanings in the Facebook posts. This research found that *La Meute* does not benefit from a similar interconnected political geography like *Démocratie Nationale* does with the European Union. Thus, *La Meute*'s Facebook posts referenced their own party at a much higher rate than *Démocratie Nationale*'s posts. It was also found that *Démocratie Nationale* mentions and shares content from other countries at a much higher rate than *La Meute*.

*This thesis is dedicated to Brendan Hickey and Ruby's Cube.*

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## Introduction

In the years following World War II, the countries of Europe began to work together in promoting peace and European economic development. Since the beginning of this “European Project” that ultimately lead to the creation of the European Union, scholars, politicians, and other Europeans have been asking how these countries, which such diverse and rich histories, are going to be able to work together in order to reach a multitude of common goals? There continues to be much debate among theorists, but it is no longer merely a question of integration amongst European countries. With an increase in refugees and migrants, integration now needs to address the effectiveness in integrating refugees and migrants into the European societies.

As immigration increases in a society, so too does xenophobia. These types of reactions have lead to the increased presence of far-right parties in some European countries. Golder indicates that the “far right party family is the fastest-growing party family in Europe (Golder 477). The New York Times reports that in parliamentary elections of twenty EU countries, fifteen countries have experienced an increase in electoral gains by right wing and far-right parties from 2000-2016<sup>1</sup> (Aisch et al.). Many far-right parties are perceived as a threat towards the effectiveness of integration. We must look at the tactics, messages, and inner-workings of far-right parties, as well as their collaboration and strengthening with other similar groups in order to better move forward in addressing these issues. The ultimate goal of European integration is to increase harmony amongst the countries. This thesis examines the tactics and collaboration of two far-right parties by comparing their tactics of posting and sharing in their own public Facebook groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Three countries had a decrease in electoral wins by right wing and far-right parties and two countries had no change.

This study is comparing the effectiveness of integration between Quebec and Wallonia by looking at the tactics of two far-right parties in these similar regions in order to see how internationalization impacts the functioning of these two groups. Looking at the outcomes of this enhanced or lessened communication can help give insight into the level of integration. Wallonia and Quebec are being examined due to their numerous similarities as regions. In order to learn more about the European Union, we can look to a EU example, Wallonia, and compare it with a very similar, but non-EU example of Quebec.

There is a great deal of academic research relating to the effects that far-right parties have on integration. However, less studied are the messages and tactics that these groups use in order to gain support of the inhabitants of the region. This research will address the tactics and messages of far-right parties and how different far-right parties use and share the resources and messages of other similar groups to enhance their anti-integration messages.

Far-right parties often use the fear of foreigners in attempts to create negative sentiments towards foreigners arriving in Europe. In 2007, Daniel Férét, the then leader of the *Front National* in Wallonia – who was ultimately kicked out of his own party – said that in 15 years, “Brussels will be under Islamic law” (Barker). Férét is using the logic that if it can happen elsewhere, it can happen here, in order to instill fear in the Walloon population. This is a tactic that far-right parties use in order to create domestic fear by sharing foreign examples.

Many far-right parties exist in Europe that have differing levels of presence, strength and effectiveness of their messages. Therefore, we must compare them to similar, non-European example in order to better analyze the situation in Europe. By using the instructive case of similar regions of Quebec and Wallonia, we can gain insight into how the spatial proximity and

political geography in the EU play an important role in the diffusion of information and ideas, compared to a more isolated group in Quebec.

## Literature Review

The study of far-right parties, tactics of far-right parties and the communication amongst political parties have been large topics of research for many decades, as well as the consequences of European integration in terms of communication. This research analyzes how far-right parties utilize this European communication network – resulting from integration – in order to collaborate with each other by sharing ideas and messages. It questions how far-right parties use this communication network as compared to far-right parties that do not benefit from a similar supranational communication and connectivity network in their region. The goal is to compare a similar EU far-right party with a non-EU far-right parties in order to learn more about this communication in the EU.

### Defining the party family

In order to understand how these parties communicate, we must first identify the far-right party family. Mudde argues that the concept of a party family, such as the right-wing extremist parties, is largely determined on the basis of the party ideology (Mudde 2). The foundation for this classification is based off of two ideological criteria: “the *name* of the party, and, when this is not (or no longer) satisfactory, the *voters*’ perception of party programmes and ideological position” (Mudde 2). This classification is performed by the party itself or of the voters; therefore “it is not the researcher who assesses the ideology of the different parties” (Cas Mudde 2). Using Mudde’s reasoning, both *La Meute* and *Démocratie National* are classified as far-right parties because of the perception of their ideologies, which align them with the far-right party family. The presence and increase of extreme-right parties come in waves (Mudde 6). Mudde states that “studies of a single party can also provide important and useful data for cross-national studies on party families” (Mudde 183). He continues, “the categorization of political parties

according to broader families has by now become a more or less standard procedure in the numerous cross-national studies of political parties” (Mudde 183). Golder expands upon Mudde’s research and determines that there are three types of grievances that create demand for far-right parties: modernization grievances, economic grievances, and cultural grievances (Golder 482). In the realm party families, it is apparent that *La Meute* and DN are both groups belonging in the same far-right party family. We will next examine some of the research on the characteristics of far-right parties.

### **Far-right parties in general**

There has been a great deal of research that has been conducted that examines far-right parties as well as explaining the different levels of support for different far-right parties. Allen states that immigration is the leading issue amongst far-right parties in Western Europe (Allen 282). Bos and Van Der Brug outline three major factors that often determine the levels of support for these parties. First, is the demand: whether individuals in society find a need for such a party to arise (Bos and Van Der Brug 779). Second, they acknowledge that their needs to be a competitive context, meaning that the political climate offers an opportunity for a party to make a difference (Bos and Van Der Brug 792). The third factor is the characteristics of the party itself (Bos and Van Der Brug 792).

Mudde distinguishes extremism and radicalism by indicating that radicalism is opposed to the constitution, whereas extremism is hostile towards the constitution (Mudde 12). Bos and Van Der Brug explain that parties that “outright reject the existing democratic system” are much less likely to be successful as compared to parties that “accept the system but propose reform,” or in other words, “it has to be efficacious to vote for a certain party” (Bos and Van Der Brug 779). Carter agrees that the differences between right-wing parties needs to be acknowledged and

that extreme-right parties, like neo-Nazi parties, are less successful in elections because parties that reject the democratic system in place are less successful than parties that propose reforms to the current democratic system (Carter 58). Carter also finds that the extreme-right parties “are more likely to experience success if a strong level of internal party discipline exists within them that minimizes dissent, and that fosters internal party cohesion and coherence” (Carter 65). The explanation for this amongst the literature is that voters will choose to not “support a party that they perceive as undemocratic or too extremist,” which is fueled by the perceived legitimacy of party leaders (Bos and Van Der Brug 792). Bos and Van Der Brug’s research supports the view that voters of anti-immigration parties use the same standards to evaluate the party that they would in evaluating other parties, so legitimacy and effectiveness are “necessary, but not sufficient, preconditions” for a party to be successful (Bos and Van Der Brug 793). Hooghe and Dassonneville also find that “low levels of political trust are associated with a preference for a protest party” (Hoogh and Dassonneville 124). Hooghe and Dassonneville acknowledge that in order to better understand how these shifting attitudes of trust affect political behavior, we must also look at changing attitudes of the society (Hoogh and Dassonneville 124). Many researchers have written on the defining characteristics of far-right parties, but what tactics do far-right parties use in order to become more successful?

### **Far-right tactics**

Far-right parties play off of the fear of immigrants and foreigners in order to push their agenda and increase their support. Increased economic and political instability, as well as an increase in refugee and migrants, allows the far-right to gain leverage in the European Union (Doerr 4). Doerr points to three main strategies that the far-right has used to increase their presence in the EU: they have “modernized their political discourse,” “mainstreamed their

programs,” and they play upon the “fear and resentment of immigrants” (Doerr 4). Doerr explains that all far-right parties “share the systematic strategy of visual or symbolic media provocation that speaks to multiple audiences” and that the use of images reinforces “anti-immigrant discourse” (Doerr 4). *La Meute* and *Démocratie Nationale* (DN) often share images or news articles that contain images that provoke anti-immigrant sentiments, which helps them leverage an anti-immigration population. Doerr demonstrates that many anti-immigration images shared by far-right groups do not need to be translated: the image talks for itself (Doerr 20). Since anti-immigration images often do not need translation, this allows for cross-national sharing of content between far-right parties.

Muis and Immerzeel note that the common attributes of far right parties is their “exclusionist, ethno-nationalist notion of citizenship,” meaning that “states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group” and that the native groups are threatened by non-native groups (Muis and Immerzeel 910). Mudde argues that populism and authoritarianism also define this party family (Mudde 182) and Muis and Immerzeel continue that “populism is a communication style or ‘thin’ ideology” that creates a “division between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Muis and Immerzeel 910). In order for far-right parties to effectively implement these tactics, the party leaders must have certain qualities.

### **Far-right leadership**

There has been a great deal of research on the qualities of leaders in successful far-right parties. Lubbers, et al. states that a “leader is the group incarnate,” meaning that the “group finds its common ideal in this leader” (Lubbers, et al. 251). Lubbers, et al. continues to say to authoritarian leaders fulfill their followers’ “need to subordinate to powerful people in order to relieve experiences of fear” (Lubbers, et al. 352). Muis and Immerzeel write about far-right



leadership and what can lead to success of the party based on leadership. Muis and Immerzeel indicate that “many leaders rely almost entirely on media attention, and successful trajectories often illustrate how media visibility can compensate for organizational weakness” (Muis and Immerzeel 916).

Johansson identifies three patterns amongst the organization of populist parties. First, he identifies that these parties have a hierarchical structure dominated by a small group of individuals at the top (Johansson 36). Lubbers, et al. agrees with Johansson that far-right parties usually gain authority “as a consequence of the hierarchical organization of the party” (Lubbers, et al. 251). Secondly, Johansson identifies personalized leadership as a commonality amongst populist party organization (Johansson 37). Muis and Immerzeel also point to “charismatic leadership” as another “prominent supply-side explanation” for success of parties (Muis and Immerzeel 917). Johansson identifies the third pattern among populist parties to be “factionalism or intra-party division,” because these parties are “prone to internal conflicts, strife, and splits” (Johansson 38). We observe this factionalism in the example of *Démocratie Nationale*, which was formerly the *Front National* in Belgium, a splinter group of the *Front National* in France. Golder points out that “national-level support for the far right hides significant subnational variation” (Golder 491). Golder identifies strong party organization as an important factor to far right party success (Golder 486). Part of this party organization includes far-right parties having many branches in order to “gain experience and test campaign tactics” (Golder 486). Golder claims that within the context of strong party organization, having a “professional and permanent staff helps portray the party as competent, reliable, accountable and predictable” (Golder 489). *La Meute* and DN both use these tactics in order to convey a united voice and message.

### **Proximity in terms of party cooperation**

The success of far-right parties has been researched by many scholars who have identified common tactics among many far-right parties, which often include an element of connectivity. Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, part of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a London-based think tank, published their findings in a report about “connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the extreme right” (Davey and Ebner). One of their key findings is that “extreme-right groups across the globe are actively collaborating to achieve common goals” (Davey and Ebner 3). This research paper examines how the EU works as a vehicle for cross-party communication among far-right parties.

Davey and Ebner acknowledge the collaboration between far-right groups, who use online platforms to “provide mechanisms for transnational knowledge exchange, fundraising and coordinated information operations” (Davey and Ebner 3). Davey and Ebner found that far-right groups, “actively seek to overcome ideological and geographic divergences for the sake of expanding their influence, reach and impact” (Davey and Ebner 3). Davey and Ebner cite that historically, these parties have been “fragmented and leaderless” (Davey and Ebner 4). However, this fragmentation and disaggregation of far-right parties by reason of conflicting ideologies has changed in the past decade. Davey and Ebner explain that this change can be attributed to the Internet, which has provided a “melting pot for different sub-cultures and smaller movements, facilitating global exchange and cooperation within likeminded groups and opportunistic allies across the globe” (Davey and Ebner 4-5). This phenomenon has resulted in the all-encompassing idea of the “alt-right” in the United States, whereas in Europe, the “identitarian movement” has experienced “increased connectivity across national borders” (Davey and Ebner 5). Identitarians use an exploitation of common grievances, such as “identity and mass immigration and shared goals” in order to “appeal to a wide range of audiences and

cement a more cohesive ideology” (Davey and Ebner 10). Davey and Ebner use the case study of the Defend Europe campaign, in which far-right supporters across Europe collaborated in order to “charter a ship with the aim of disrupting the flow of migrants crossing from Libya” (Davey and Ebner 10). The Defend Europe case study demonstrates how many different far-right groups collaborated across Europe in order to act on a common ideology. Davey and Ebner use the term “platform convergence” to describe the “new collaboration opportunities arising from alternative platforms” such as online meeting points, which have allowed for this cross-border collaboration (Davey and Ebner 25). We will see how *La Meute* and DN differ in their cross-border collaboration with other far-right parties.

Davey and Ebner warn that “without the development of novel counter-strategies it is likely that the extreme-right will continue to flourish on these platforms, creating more cohesive communities which collaborate to support coordinated online raids which disseminate extremist content to mainstream platforms and high-profile offline activism” (Davey and Ebner 26). The collaboration of these groups is often due to grievances and victimhood narratives (Davey and Ebner 26). This is the case for DN; they use examples of grievances and victimhood – perceived victims of radical Islam – in order to come together with other groups. This is also the case for *La Meute* and far-right parties in general.

Davey and Ebner note that even many non-Identitarian groups also benefited from the cross-Europe collaboration by using the media attention from the campaign as a platform for their own attention. Davey and Ebner conclude that the Defend Europe case “demonstrates how groups and individuals are prepared to put aside ideological differences which have previously caused divisions and ruptures in the extreme-right ecosystem and instead focus on commonality”

(Davey and Ebner 11). The Defend Europe case study demonstrates how political party cooperation has been successful for the far-right.

### **Connectivity**

The idea of spatial proximity plays an important role in this cross-nation communication and collaboration between groups with similar goals. Hoekman, et al. explain that those “that are in close vicinity interact more intensively than those at a distance” (Hoekman, et al. 662).

However, long-distance collaboration activities have become more common with the “recent advances in information and telecommunication technologies,” such as social media (Hoekman, et al. 662). Hoekman, et al. cites two main reasons for this long-distance collaboration: it saves on costs infrastructure and it “generates intellectual benefits through the cross-fertilization of ideas” (Hoekman, et al.).

Littler and Feldman share the idea of *cordon sanitaire*, stating that under it, “groups or individuals associated with extreme political positions are either formally or informally deprived of any media platform” (Littler and Feldman 512). However, with the “development of a culture of news ‘sharing’ on social media,” many populist groups have been able to overcome the *cordon sanitaire* and “the number of routes to public engagement have thus dramatically increased” (Littler and Feldman 513). Littler and Feldman conclude that right wing anti-immigration groups have had continued growth despite the *cordon sanitaire* due to “the role of social media in facilitating the violation of the *cordon sanitaire*” (Littler and Feldman 519). The *cordon sanitaire* is also used by other political parties, in terms of coalitions, at the regional, national and supranational levels. Opposing parties can work together in order to block far-right parties, just as traditional media has historically done.

Johnson and Kaye establish that since the rise of journalism on the Internet, “individuals spouting their views often appeared as credible” even for those that are “hosted by reliable sources” (Johnson and Kaye 624). These sites often “lacked editorial oversight and did not have the professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information” (Johnson and Kaye 624). Johnson and Kaye cite studies of mainstream media that “suggest that the more people rely on the media for news and information, the more they will judge that information as credible” (Johnson and Kaye 624). For far-right parties, as in the examples of *La Meute* and DN, we can assume that, even if their Facebook posts cite biased sources, according to Johnson and Kaye, the more that supporters rely on their pages for information, the more they will believe the information is credible, even if it is not. Johnson and Kaye found that “political trust” was a strong “predictor of credibility of online newspaper” news and that “strong partisans tended to judge online media as believable” (Johnson and Kaye 626).

### **Political Geography: The European Union**

In diving deeper into the field of connectivity, scholars demonstrate that political geography plays a large role in spatial proximity. One of the most notable modern researchers of political geographers is Dr. John A. Agnew. Agnew, et al. explains that:

For us, political geography is about how barriers between people and their political communities are put up and come down; how world orders based on different geographic organizing principles (such as empires, state systems, and ideological-material relationships) arise and collapse; and how material processes and political movements are re-making how we inhabit and imagine the world political map. (Agnew, et al. 2)

In other words, political geography studies both the consequences of political processes, as well as the ways that the political processes are affected by geographic structures. One area of

political geography that is particularly interesting for this research is the one that “adopts a spatial-analytic perspective” in order to examine geographic patterns related to political parties in order to identify the spread of “democratic practices” (Agnew, et al. 4).

Kuus examines how this political geography works within the context of the European Union. Kuss concludes that there is a “spatiality of knowledge production” that is not just “big picture assemblages,” but also within many sub-national communication networks (Kuss 284). We also learn from Kuss that “geographical proximity” plays a role in the perception of “authenticity and validity over other places” (Kuss 284). Kuss demonstrates that when information is shared among groups within the same political geography, the perceived validity of this information is greater.

Kuss also finds that information that is being spread by a group is “intimately bound” with the position of the speakers, and therefore with rest of their group as well (Kuss 285). By applying Kuss’s findings to far-right parties, we see that “when individuals say that an issue is not controversial, what they really communicate is that the point is not controversial *in their circles*” (Kuss 285). This means that when a far-right party makes claims, their perceived expertise is “understood in part through geographical analogies and metaphors,” such as sharing stories from other far-right parties that have similar controversial views (Kuss 285). As demonstrated by Kuss, however, these views are not seen as controversial because they are using a wide breadth of cross-national examples. Agnew describes a similar principle by stating that, “political action may ultimately result from the acts of individuals, but it is best explained by reference to the social contexts in which those individuals carry on their everyday lives” (Agnew 204). Agnew indicates that the actions of political groups, such as which content they choose to share, depends on the individuals, but is best explained by the social context of those individuals

(Agnew 204). This basic principle will be used throughout this paper in determining how the social context of the EU impacts the actions of a far-right group within the EU.

## Theory

Bearing in mind that social context and political geography affect the actions of political groups in addition to the individuals (Agnew 204), then what differences would we expect to see between a far-right party in a country that benefits from the political geography of the EU, such as *Démocratie National* in Wallonia, versus a far-right party in a country that does not benefit from a supranational political geography, like *La Meute* in Quebec? This section will theorize, based on the literature, what difference we will expect to see between the Facebook activity of DN and *La Meute*.

This paper aims to answer the question of how does the communication of far-right parties change when influenced by surrounding far-right parties, such as the EU example of Wallonia, versus those that are acting without much outside influence, in the case of Quebec? Throughout the history of the European Union, goals of integration have been an integral aspect of the union (“The EU in Brief”). In order for the EU to progress, there have been recurring integration related goals, such as the economic goals to: “establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro,” the movement goals to “offer freedom, security and justice without internal borders” (“The EU in Brief”) and communications goals, such as foreign language acquisitions goals of “speaking other languages helps people from different cultures understand one another - essential in a multilingual, multicultural Europe” (“Multilingualism”). The European Union has brought about a closeness among countries that has resulted in many connections being established for the development and advancement of the union. This paper will examine how the closeness experienced in the European Union has affected the far-right party in Wallonia’s experiences due to proximal far-right parties. This paper, in general,



theorizes that without the continual integration seen in the European Union, the success of interconnectivity of *La Meute* with other far-right parties will not be as possible.

This question is really looking at the role of distance and communication in far-right party connectivity. Due to the proximity and connectivity offered from the EU, as explained by Agnew and Kuss, I hypothesize that Wallonia will have greater cooperation and closeness with far-right parties from surrounding EU-countries compared to Quebec, which we expect will have less cooperation with surrounding far-right parties. The reasoning for this hypothesis is that Wallonia has more established communication lines with other far-right parties, due to the vehicle that the European Union has provided, as compared to Quebec, which is considered more isolated and lacks a supranational integrated entity.

According to Doerr, anti-immigration images can be shared cross-nationally and evoke similar messages without the use of translation. Davey and Ebner explain that far-right groups are actively communicating in order to achieve mutual objectives. Due to these occurrences, this paper hypothesizes that strong communication networks between far-right parties will allow for more of the cross-national sharing of content described by Davey and Ebner. Therefore, we expect to see that DN, which has a strong communication network because of the European union, will have higher cross-national sharing than *La Meute*, which does not benefit from a similar connectivity network. The reasoning for this is that DN has this communication network that, according to Doerr and Davey and Ebner, will increase their communication with other groups, whereas *La Meute* does not benefit from such communication networks.

Since the creation of the European Union, many scholars have praised the continual integration and increase in communication amongst European citizens (“The EU in Brief”). This paper theorizes that if these EU networks allow more communication and connectivity among its

citizens, then should this not also hold true for far-right parties? In other words, cannot far-right parties exploit this communication network in order to propagate their hateful messages? In order to test this hypothesis, the communication tactics of a EU far-right party, DN, will be compared with a non-EU far-right party, *La Meute*. In order to make this comparison and test this hypothesis, it will need to be demonstrated that the two parties come from very similar regions or communities, but their communication tactics will need to differ. To confirm this hypothesis, it must be demonstrated that DN uses the interconnectivity of the EU and *La Meute* does not use a similar interconnected communication network and thus has less instances of online cross-party connectivity.

For far-right parties to succeed, they must demonstrate to their supporters that there are similar-minded individuals elsewhere. This project hypothesizes that groups like DN overcome and soften or mask this discrepancy by tapping into other far-right parties to show that there are similar-minded individuals elsewhere, which can strengthen their argument. Conversely, it is theorized that *La Meute* does not have the outside-of-Quebec connections to tap into, and therefore have a weaker support. Golder (2016) states that more progress in the field can be made “by paying more attention to the political geography of far right support” (Golder 493-94). This paper aims to examine the political geography, as described by Kuss and Agnew, by analyzing the communication networks of *La Meute* and DN.

*La Meute* does not have access to a supranational system that can be used as a vessel for connecting them with surrounding far-right parties to the same extent that *Démocratie Nationale* does with the EU. Using this information, this paper hypothesizes that *La Meute* will have significantly less posting that reference other countries due to a lack of a communal supranational system with the surrounding countries that would allow for communication or an

ongoing dialogue. Conversely, *La Meute* does not have these connections and commonalities and is therefore more isolated from potential far-right party collaboration, as compared to DN. I also hypothesize that the *La Meute* Facebook posts will have more isolationist, self-referential types of posts than DN due to their geographic isolation. DN has many prominent far-right parties in the surrounding area, which is why I hypothesize that they will demonstrate more far-right party collaboration.

Davey and Ebner explain that in recent years, far-right groups have put aside some differences to achieve a commonality (Davey and Ebner 11). We expect to see that *Démocratie National*, by means of the EU political geography, will share information from other, non-identical, political parties in Europe who have common goals. This is not to say that *La Meute* would not do this, but rather *La Meute* does not benefit from the same political geography that allows an interconnectivity to easily facilitate this type of sharing.

Littler and Feldman found that social media has helped violate the notion of *cordon sanitaire* (Littler and Feldman 512). Using this reasoning, I theorize that DN's cross-party connectivity – due to the EU integration – has allowed them to violate the *cordon sanitaire* by utilizing this network in order to voice their views, as well as the views of far-right parties who share these common views.

Since political geography, according to Kuss, demonstrates that perceived expertise of far-right party claims use their political geography to make commonly understood claims, far-right parties use this connectivity of political geography in order to continue spreading their views. Agnew notes that although individuals make decisions in political tactics, it is ultimately the political geography that impacts these decisions. Therefore, in sum, I theorize that DN, who has the political geography of the European Union, will utilize the cross-national connections –

which contribute to this political geography – more than *La Meute*, which does not benefit from a similar political geography.

## Case Selection

In order to answer the research question, it must be demonstrated that Quebec and Wallonia are in fact two comparable regions. Since this paper is examining the closeness of the EU and how this affects far-right parties, two comparable regions must be selected. This section will outline and describe the two selected regions: one that is part of the EU and one that is not. By comparing the communication tactics of two similar regions, we are able to better control the variable that proximity plays in the communication of far-right parties.

### **I: Basic Information about Quebec and Wallonia & Similarities Between Them**

Wallonia and Quebec are quite similar regions, so it is interesting to examine the two in order to demonstrate many similar attributes for the case design. Wallonia is home to 3.5 million people who live in the southern region of Belgium, which as a whole has a population of around 11 million (Cole 379). Similarly proportional, Quebec has a population of around 8 million as part of the eastern province of Canada, which is home to around 35 million (Behiels). Wallonia and Quebec both represent similar population proportions compared to the rest of their country: the population of Wallonia is around 32% of the Belgian population (“The World Factbook – Belgium”) and the population of Quebec is around 23% of the Canadian population (“The World Factbook – Canada”). Both regions are the second largest sub-national regions in their respective countries by about one half: Wallonia is second to Flanders, which has a population of about 6.4 million and Quebec is the second largest region after Ontario, which has a population of about 13.6 million (Behiels). The two regions also have a similar GDP per capita. The Walloon region was about 33,000 USD (“Belgium: GDP”) compared to Quebec’s slightly larger GDP of 37,000 USD (“Québec GDP”).

Both regions are home to majority French language speakers. The Walloons, who are predominantly Catholic, speak French, which differs from Flanders, which speaks Flemish (Cole 379). Similar to Wallonia, a vast majority of the *Québécois* claims Catholicism as their religion (Behiels). French and English are both official languages of Canada, but, like Wallonia, French is the only official language of the Quebec province (Behiels). French has been the official language of the Quebec province since 1974 and this was reaffirmed in Bill 101 of the Charter of the French Language in 1977 (Behiels). In Canada, like Belgium, French is only the second largest language spoken in the country. However, in both Wallonia and Quebec, French is by far the dominant language.

Belgium and Canada have similar government types and structures. Belgium is a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy (Cole 379). The Canadian government, formally Her Majesty's Government, also has a federal parliamentary system under a constitutional monarchy (Sawe).

Both Wallonia and Quebec have French roots, but have also been able to break apart in some aspects from these historic influences. The Walloons consume much French culture “by reason of shared language and geographic proximity,” but differ between from France, in that the French “are conscious of belonging to a country with a glorious history,” whereas the Walloons, “generally do not feel the same regarding Wallonia” (Cole 379). This is in part due to the boundaries of the region that have shifted frequently (Cole 379). Wallonia was not named so until 1844, which gives it a relatively new history compared to other European regions (Cole 379). The Walloon Region, a political body, was not established until the revision of the Belgian Constitution in 1971 (Cole 379). Wallonia experiences a relatively new history, which makes it

different from other European regions that have a deep history that is often instilled in its inhabitants.

In search for a Walloon identity, André Lecours explains that Walloon governmental parties have included international mission statements, since politicians in Wallonia have found “fertile ground for identity-generating action/policies” in the “international sphere” (Lecours 97-98). These politicians have found that by making international policies a priority there creates “notions of Walloon unity, distinctiveness and individuality” (Lecours 98). By federalizing Belgium, Lecours argues that Wallonia became more autonomous and was able to develop institutions that allowed for an international presence, which helped the region define the “economic and social interests specific to Wallonia” (Lecours 98).

During the 1600s, the French colonized much of North America and named it New France (Behiels). The boundaries of Quebec, like Wallonia, changed many times until 1927 when they remained the same until today (Behiels). Since the British acquired New France in 1763, the francophone community has struggled “for survival and recognition as one of Canada’s founding peoples within a predominantly Anglophone...Canadian federation” (Behiels). Both Wallonia and Quebec have French roots, but have been able to somewhat remove themselves from French influence in the past century and establish their own sub-national cultures in their respective countries.

## **II: Political Parties**

In addition to all of these similarities, Wallonia and Quebec have similar political party structures. The most prominent far-right party in Wallonia is *Démocratie Nationale* (DN) and the most prominent far-right party in Quebec is *La Meute*.

Unlike *La Meute* where the region and language – Quebec and French – overlap agreeably, DN has a different situation. In Belgium, Brussels poses a blurry issue when it comes to regions and languages for DN; the French language region does not cover just Wallonia, it also covers some of Brussels. For this reason, DN works at the community level – the French Community – so that they can talk with their compatriots in Brussels, rather than just Wallonia.

Although both *La Meute* and DN have relatively recent histories under their current names and leadership, DN finds its roots in the *Front National* in France. As a satellite party of the *Front National* in France, Daniel Féret established the Belgian *Front National* in 1985 and although it was “not nearly as strong or as organized as *Vlaams Belang*” in Flanders, it was the main far-right party in Wallonia and had close ties with the *Front National* in France (Barker). However, in 2011, the *Front National* in France sued the *Front National* in Belgium “to stop the party from using the name” (Aalberg, et al.). The party changed its name to *Démocratie Nationale* (DN), while also changing its logos and some of its leadership, and thus, the DN, as we know it today, began in 2011 (Aalberg, et al.). Only a few years later, two former Canadian veterans founded *La Meute* in 2015 (Montpetit). The founders created *La Meute* as a “hierarchical organization modeled on their military background,” and the group began to work almost exclusively online through a private Facebook group (Montpetit).

It is difficult to determine membership for *La Meute* and DN. Since both parties have aspects of their group that work in secrecy, it is difficult to determine an estimate for each group’s membership. *La Meute* boasts that it gained 40,000 members in its first year, but this number just refers to members of their Facebook group and not necessarily true active members (Montpetit). Neither *La Meute* nor DN claim membership numbers on their official websites



(Santi) (“La Meute Officiel”). Electoral results can sometimes be a rough indicator of party support. However, *La Meute* has yet to participate in any elections. For DN, we can look to their previous party, the Belgian *Front National*, which had its last electoral win in 2007 when they won just over 131,000 votes (“Far-Right Boss”).

Both *La Meute* and DN communicate amongst their members almost exclusively in French. *La Meute* also communicates with the public almost exclusively in the French language. However, *Démocratie Nationale*’s official website offers translations in French, Dutch, German, English, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian and Russian (Santi), whereas *La Meute* only offers French (“La Meute Officiel”).

*La Meute* aims to “boycott halal products, circulate petitions against government policies that foster multiculturalism and post stories from little-known publications about the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Quebec” (Montpetit). Similarly, DN has many anti-immigration and xenophobic ideals and messages.

In a study by Stier et al. they note that when they collected Facebook data from far-right groups, “our data do not contain posts and comments that had either been deleted by users, moderators of the political Facebook pages or by Facebook...therefore, the data set depicts the curated self-presentation and as a such the strategic considerations of political actors our research aims to reveal” (Stier et al. 1371). This project will have a similar attributes in the data set because of the ways the parties run their Facebook pages. Both *La Meute* and DN use their public Facebook pages to post in a unified manner. *La Meute* has their officers – who are the administrators of the Facebook page – do the posting. This might be a result of their insularity and internal organization structure. On the other hand, DN has analogs in other countries, so they might not have the need to post as individuals, which is demonstrated by their Facebook posts

being posted by the page itself, and not individuals. Nonetheless, both groups unite behind a generally unified voice and they both also censor the messages – on a social media platform group that is perceived to have freedom of ideas – by only allowing certain individuals to post.

### **III: Most important difference: Distance**

In the most similar case design, the sole differentiating quality of interest is the independent variable. When discussing and analyzing regions, it is impossible to find two identical regions for a true most similar case design. As mentioned earlier in this section, however, Wallonia and Quebec present themselves as two very comparable regions. For this research, the geographic barrier is the independent variable. Wallonia has close proximity to many nationalist parties that share the same language or country with them, whereas Quebec has the massive geographic barrier between itself and the majority of the Francophone world. This project will examine the impact that this geographic barrier has on nationalistic influence of these two similar regions.

In the case of Wallonia, it is observed that there is a relationship with France because of the same language and with Flanders due to similar ideologies and both being part of the same nation. Since *Démocratie Nationale* has roots in the French far-right party, the *Front National*, and since the two parties have many ideologies, such as nationalism and strict control of immigration, these parties can benefit from each other by having the same roots (Ray). *Démocratie Nationale* also can benefit from the electoral successes of the French *Front National*. Under Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the party from 1972 to 2011, the *Front National* experienced many sizable electoral victories in the French government. Under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, the French *Front National* finished first in European Parliament elections in 2014 with one fourth of the vote, and she came in second in the

French presidential elections in 2017 (Ray). The *Front National* in France is known for having strong anti-immigration messages, but the “party is prepared to soften its notoriously hard line against immigrants in the case of its francophone Belgian cousins” (Willsher). Le Pen explains that if Flanders declares its independence, which she believes is a possibility, then “the French republic would do well to welcome Wallonia to its heart” (Willsher). This demonstrates that France considers Walloons to be more French than it does for other nationalities. Le Pen explains this strong connection is due to “historic and fraternal links that unite our two people,” and that there connections are “too strong for France to abandon the Walloons” (Willsher).

Wallonia experiences strong relationships with surrounding regions. However, in Quebec, these types of relationships are not found. In terms of a relationship with other parts of Canada, language is a large barrier. Desrochers indicates that Québec is often defined as “a nation within the nation-state of Canada” which is further exemplified through the common Québec expression, “maîtres chez nous” or “masters in our own home.” (Desrochers 3). Throughout Quebec’s history as a British colony, never “has Québec behaved like, or been treated as, other provinces” (Desrochers 5). Some historians believe that the francophone population was “already recognized as a ‘distinct people’” dating back to the British North America Act of 1867 (Desrochers 5).

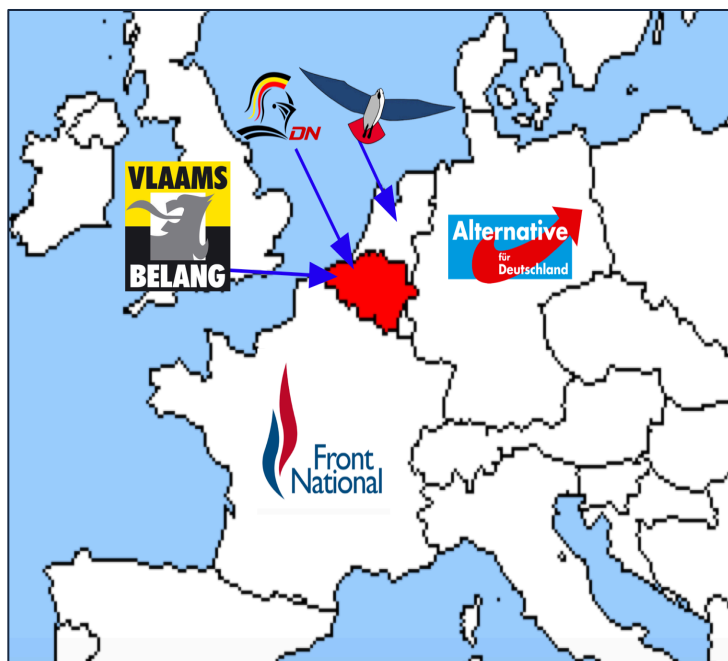
Canada only shares a border with the United States, as demonstrated in Image 1, whereas Belgium shares a border with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, as demonstrated in Image 2. In terms of surrounding political parties, *Démocratie Nationale* (DN) has many prominent parties that are part of regions or countries that are geographically close. These parties do not just exist in secretive or online forums, but rather, many of them are

**Image 1: Far-right Parties Surrounding Quebec**



*Source:* Wikipedia. Coloring and logos added by myself.

**Image 2: Far-right Parties Surrounding Wallonia**



*Source:* Wikipedia. Coloring and logos added by myself.

legitimate parties that have a track record of electoral success to prove it. *Vlaams Belang*, a far-right party in Flanders, has continued to have electoral success in the Regional Parliament, the Belgian Federal Parliament, and the European Parliament (Deloy). The *Front National* in France, the far-right party that DN developed out of, has had continued success in elections, like *Vlaams Belang*. DN and the French *Front National* can also benefit from each other due to the shared language. In Germany, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) has also experienced electoral success in the twenty-first century in the State Parliament, Federal Parliament and European Parliament (Hawley). In the past decade, the Nationalist party in the Netherlands, *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, has consistently obtained more than ten percent of the vote in the House of Representatives and Senate as well as the European Parliament (Foster, et al.). It is clear that DN is surrounded by multiple successful far-right parties.

In the discussion of the effects of proximity on relationships of Quebec, it is important to also look at the case of the relationship between Quebec and the United States. While *Démocratie Nationale* in Wallonia is part of the European Union – the same representative system as *Vlaams Belang* (Belgium), the *National Front* (France), *Alternative für Deutschland* (Germany) and the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Netherlands) – *La Meute* in Quebec does not share a common representative system. Quebec and the United States do not have a similar supranational cooperation similar to Wallonia and these other regions. For Quebec, the notion of a ‘distinct society’ separates them from the rest of Canada by language, culture and identity. One might point to proximal American far-right parties, such as the KKK, but there are many structural deficiencies that hinder proper coordination, such as language and representational structure.

There exist other far-right parties in Canada outside of Quebec. However, unlike *Vlaams Belang*, for example, these parties have had very little electoral success (Heard). Canadian Alliance, a right-wing party, only gained a small percentage of seats in the federal election of 2000, so they merged with another conservative party in order to form a new party called the Conservative Party of Canada (Heard). Even though the Conservative Party of Canada has often gained enough votes to become the opposition in the government, the Conservative Party of Canada has shifted on the political spectrum and is now considered to be between right and center-right (Heard), and therefore would not align ideologically with *La Meute*. The Nationalist Party of Canada, an unregistered far-right party, often receives only a fraction of a percent of the vote in Canada, and thus has not been a successful party in the surrounding region for *La Meute* (Heard). A summary of the similarities and differences between Wallonia and Quebec can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of Case Selection**

	<b>Wallonia</b>	<b>Quebec</b>
Country	Belgium	Canada
Population	3.5 million	8 million
Country Population	11 million	35 million
Proportion of Country Population	32%	23%
Sub-national Population	2 <sup>nd</sup> (1/2 size of Flanders)	2 <sup>nd</sup> (1/2 size of Ontario)
Predominant Religion	Catholic	Catholic
Region's Dominant Language	French	French
Country's Dominant Language	Dutch	English
Government Type	Parliamentary Democracy under a Constitutional Monarchy	Parliamentary Democracy under a Constitutional Monarchy
GDP Per Capita	33,000 USD	37,000 USD
Roots in France	Yes	Yes
Part of the EU	Yes	No

This paper theorizes that distance is the most important aspect when analyzing far-right party cooperation. While distance is important, there are other ways that distance manifests itself. This thesis is looking at shared borders and physical distance between regions, but there are other ways that distance expresses itself, such as different representation systems, the possibility of having cultural systems or language systems, and although these aspects are not specifically distance, they have relationships to distance that might result in disrupting or confusing the issue. Although these distinctions exist and matter, ultimately they should not make a difference and I still predict to see the results that I am expecting.

## Methodology

In order to successfully answer the research question, this study will use a type of qualitative analysis as a method of research. The type of qualitative analysis that will be used is critical discourse analysis by utilizing thick descriptions. I will implement these methods by using the most similar case design. This specific type of qualitative analysis is important because this study is looking at Facebook posts from *La Meute* and *Démocratie Nationale*'s (DN) public Facebook groups. Although certain aspects of these posts will be quantified, thick descriptions are used to find deeper meaning when comparing the two cases in the most similar case design.

This section will outline the justification for using the chosen research methods and why these methods are the best choices for this research question. Social media posts on Facebook will be used as data for this study, because it offers essential insight into the psychology of how these groups function internally and with the public and what types of collaborations are present with other groups.

There are many different ways in which scholars can do research, often either by using qualitative or quantitative methods. There are pros and cons to each method depending on the type of data collected and the aspects of the data that a researcher wants to focus on. This paper will primarily deal with qualitative research methods.

Dey explains that, "There is no one kind of qualitative data analysis, but rather a variety of approaches, related to the different perspectives and purposes of researchers" (Dey 1). Qualitative data deals with meanings, and "meanings are mediated mainly through language and action" and "meanings reside in social practice" (Dey 11-12). Qualitative data "embraces an enormously rich spectrum of cultural and social artifacts" (Dey 13). This research will rely on



qualitative data, because it is looking at the social practices of Facebook postings in order to derive meaning in the tactics and behaviors of far-right parties in Wallonia and Quebec.

This project is specifically examining abstract approaches to collaboration between groups. Examples of this abstractness of research include the levels of support of different countries, the trickle-down effect of ideas and messages between groups and their willingness to be open with other groups. All of these approaches that are needed are culturally bound phenomena. For the purposes of answering this research question, examining Facebook posts will be more useful than conducting opinion polls, for example, because these posts tell a greater story about the culturally bound occurrences, which give more insight into the question at hand. Facebook post analysis allows a researcher to look at diction, context, content and word choice, which paint a picture of a group's motive and levels of cooperation with other groups. Opinion polls evaluate hypothetical scenarios, whereas examining a Facebook posts give a truer insight into the passions and opinions of the poster about real scenarios in which they are engaged.

By using qualitative methods to look at Facebook posts instead of quantitative methods to examine opinion polls, we gain valuable insights into a larger culture and story about the communication of *La Meute* and DN. In opinion polls, simple tallying and other quantifiable measures are used. However, for this project, other qualitative research methods must be implemented in order to better interpret the data.

Critical discourse analysis allows researchers to create a “general framework for problem-oriented social research,” when “investigating complex social phenomena” (Baker et al. 279-80). Van Dijk explains that unlike researchers using other types of discourse analysis, those using critical discourse analysis should “take an explicit sociopolitical stance: they spell out their

point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large” (Van Dijk 252)<sup>2</sup>.

In critical discourse analysis, “language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use people make of it and by the people who have access to language means and public fora” (Baker et al. 280). A researcher using critical discourse analysis should have aspirations with their research to create “change through critical understanding” (Van Dijk 252). This research hopes to gain valuable insights that can address and discuss issues related to far-right parties in Europe. Van Dijk explains that critical discourse scholars are motivated by wanting to “make a more specific contribution, namely to get more insight into the crucial role of discourse in the reproduction of dominance and inequality” (Van Dijk 253). The theoretical and practical sides of critical discourse analysis both “focus on the structures of text and talk” (Van Dijk 259). Critical discourse analysis is used to examine groups that have the power to influence or persuade their audiences, and the role of a critical discourse analyst is to determine which “structures and strategies are involved” in the process of persuading and influencing their audiences (Van Dijk 259). This power can be used by “access to certain public spheres” (Baker et al. 280) such as an approved poster – and administrator – in a public Facebook group. Continuing on the example of a Facebook group, “those groups who are in control of most influential public discourses,” as stated by Baker et al., which include the approved posters of the Facebook group, who “play a special role in the reproduction of dominant knowledge and ideologies in a society” (Baker et al. 280). These groups use their power – being the only curated, self-presented strategic output voice of the Facebook group – to shape the way that others perceive them and the party. The administrators and posters in a censored group - like *La Meute* and DN – are, in essence,

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<sup>2</sup> Van Dijk recommends that for critical discourse analysis, a researcher should make their intentions known. This research is examining the groupthink mentality and the echo-chamber of similar ideas effects that are observed in far-right party Facebook groups.

‘thought-leaders’. The messages and ideas that they post or choose to share are being used in exercises of thought persuasion. These messages and opinions are meaningful, impactful and important for their group members. Unlike verbal communication, the role of a Facebook group administrator has power engrained in many components of it, which makes critical discourse analysis particularly appropriate and important here.

Baker et al. defends using critical discourse analysis over “purely descriptive, data-driven approaches, which are epistemologically inadequate in accounting for the complex linguistic choices made during the processes of text production” (Baker et al. 281). Legislators, elected officials, and think tanks, for example, use critical discourse analysis to address large-scale societal issues. The goal of critical discourse analysis in this research, however, is to look at the small aspects of online far-right communication, where power is still important. Their power, however limited it may be, can still be examined – on a smaller scale – using critical discourse analysis. As the only individuals who have the power to make posts and delete comments, the Facebook administrators have the power over the followers because they are thought leaders and shape the discussion. In a context like Facebook, many users perceive it to be an open, free-flowing conversation of ideas. When these members join groups, like *La Meute*’s or DN’s public groups, these individuals will perceive them to work in an open, censor-free environment like the rest of Facebook. However, the administrators are able to delete comments that do not coincide with the views of the group. Therefore, these administrators have a lot of censorship power in an arena that is perceived to be relatively censor free.

Even though Facebook is a relatively new communication platform, it has become mainstream enough that scholars have acknowledged the importance of studying it, including the Facebook groups of far-right parties. Stier et al. asserts that Facebook is a well-suited social

network platform for political parties because it is the “social network with the highest societal diffusion” (Stier et al. 1366). Facebook allows fringe organizations to have a platform when they refuse to “talk to traditional media” and often provide insights into the “textual manifestation of its policy positions” (Stier et al. 1367). Stier et al. demonstrate that for the German far-right group *Alternative für Deutschland*, there is a preference to use Facebook because there is a “higher degree of control that an owner of a Facebook page can exert,” whereas, “debates on Twitter are publicly open and not subject to moderation” (Stier et al. 1367). This holds true for *La Meute* and DN, which both have restrictions on who can post on their public Facebook pages. Facebook has a vast and extended presence on the social network realm, and therefore it is an ideal “data source to compare political communication” between different parties (Stier et al. 1371).

Clifford Geerts cites Gilbert Ryle and his “thick description” as a methodology of social sciences based on “Thinking and Reflecting” and “The Thinking of Thoughts,” which will play an important role in analyzing the Facebook posts (Geerts 214). Ryle uses the example of two individuals who are “rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes” where one has “an involuntary twitch” and the other has “a conspiratorial signal to a friend” (Geerts 214-15). He continues to explain that from a phenomenalist observation of the two individuals, the “two movements are, as movements, identical” (Geerts 215). A difference between the two cannot be made in terms of just phenomenalist observations, however the difference “between a twitch and wink is vast” and although they have both contracted their eyelids, one of them has done an additional action: they have winked (Geerts 215). Ryle goes one step further and proposes a third individual who is parodying the second individual’s wink (Geerts 215). Through the example of twitching versus winking versus parodying a wink, Ryle demonstrates a “hierarchy of

meaningful structures” (Geerts 215). “This school of thought holds that culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of individuals guide their behavior” (Geerts 218). “Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described” (Geerts 218).

In order to better find deeper meaning in the culture acting behind the message of far-right groups, it will be most beneficial to use thick descriptions when observing these Facebook posts. This will help determine not just surface-level aspects of the observable post, but rather it will help discover sub-text and deeper messages of these posts. One of the greatest strengths gained from using thick descriptions to analyze Facebook posts will be leveraging the content in order to acquire greater insight into answering the research question.

### Image 3: *La Meute* Facebook Post from December 2, 2017



In Image 3, an approved administrator of the public *La Meute* Facebook page posts an article about Justin Trudeau's history of crying in public. The poster adds his own words to the post: "I almost shed a tear..." (translated). On the surface, without any knowledge or deeper reading of the post or poster, one would interpret that the poster is sad and literally almost in tears. However, if we use thick descriptions, we are able to find deeper meaning in the text and determine that the text is in fact sarcastic and mocking Trudeau and the article.

Once we have established that critical discourse analysis is an appropriate vehicle, we can now start to look at the decision to select two similar cases to compare.

This study is not just observing Facebook posts, for example, but rather it is examining the posts in order to establish the grounds for a comparison between Quebec and Wallonia. It will do this by establishing a most similar case design in order to analyze these posts.

The most similar method is "one of the oldest recognized techniques of qualitative analysis" and dates back to J.S. Mill's *System of Logic* (1872) (Seawright and Gerring 305). The most similar method "employs a minimum of two cases" for analysis (Seawright and Gerring 304). For the purest form of most similar case design "the chosen pair of cases is similar on all the measured independent variables, *except* the independent variable of interest" (Seawright and Gerring 304). However, when examining situations where exact matching is not possible, such as in the case with comparing two cultures, "researchers may employ approximate matching, in which cases from the control group that are close enough to matching cases from the treatment group are accepted as matches" (Seawright and Gerring 305). In the case of this experiment, qualities of Wallonia are the control group, and the treatment group is the qualities of Quebec.

Since no two regions in the world will be the exact same across all criteria except one, as needed for the purest form of most similar case design, this project employs approximate

matching. In the context of dealing with large groups of people, this methodology of approximate matching will be used to demonstrate how similar Wallonia and Quebec really are as far as two regions realistically can be. Following the most similar case design, the variable of proximity for the two regions can be used in order to aid in answering the research question. As discussed in the previous section, we saw that there exists a multitude of similarities between Wallonia and Quebec across many different aspects of the regions. The differences that we are examining, such as distance and isolation, are such that we have a great deal of leverage on the research question. In other words, Wallonia and Quebec are very similar except for the communication that they have with other surrounding regions. Therefore, we can analyze how and to what extent spatial proximity and political geography play a role in the tactics of *La Meute* versus *Démocratie Nationale*.

## Data

In order to evaluate the differences between *La Meute* and *Démocratie Nationale*, 250 of the most recent posts from each group's public Facebook group were analyzed in a number of categories. Posts were analyzed to determine whether the post was original content or shared from somewhere else; what is being shared; if the post shares from a journal or news source (if so, is it from the region, from the country, or neither); does the text in the post mention the group (DN or *La Meute*), the region (Wallonia/Brussels or Quebec), the country (Belgium or Canada), and/or another country (or Europe). If any of these criteria were present, the post was given +1 in the column for that criterion. Even if multiple instances of single criteria were present for the same post, only +1 was added. The sums of each column were calculated, as can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3.<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for further information about the data collection process.

As previously discussed, thick descriptions allow us to uncover deeper, sub-surface meanings of these posts, we can still gain some valuable insights from the +1 qualitative system.

**Table 2: Number of Mentions in each Facebook Group per 250 posts.**

Group	Own Group	Own Region	Own Country
<i>La Meute</i>	126	83	43
<i>Démocratie Nationale</i>	24	5	8

As seen in Table 2, for the *La Meute* Facebook group, most of the posts are referencing their own party often about how immigrants are infiltrating *their* Quebec. There is an element of individualism among the posts in *La Meute*. They mention their own group "*La Meute*" in 126/250 posts (50.4%), whereas DN only mentioned their own group in 12/250 posts (5.6%). *La Meute* also mentioned their own region and country at a much higher frequency than DN did:

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<sup>3</sup> Full data available upon request.



83/250 (33.2%) versus 5/250 (2%). This large difference furthers the idea that *La Meute* places more emphasis on posting about subjects related to their own party, region and country than DN.

**Table 3: Number of Mentions of Another Country or Europe in each Facebook Group per 250 posts**

Group	Other Country/Europe
<i>La Meute</i>	24
<i>Démocratie Nationale</i>	35

Using the same +1 qualitative system Table 3 shows the totals for each group having a post that mentions another country or Europe. Unlike Table 2, Table 3 demonstrates that DN posts about other countries or Europe more than *La Meute* does. *La Meute* still occasionally mentions other countries in their posts. The intent for this category was to observe and determine the awareness of the actions of far-right groups in surrounding countries. However, the nature of the mentions is different between the two groups, so the reader should be cautioned as to their implications<sup>4</sup>.

Qualitative measurements have supplied some essential, yet basic, information on the differences of what the two groups are posting about. However, thick descriptions let us find more profound and insightful information, which might not be apparent through the qualitative methods.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A

**Image 4: *La Meute* Facebook Post from February 26, 2017<sup>5</sup>**



\*\*\*\*\* ATTENTION \*\*\*\*\*

J'aimerais porter à votre attention cher membres de la page publique, que si vous voulez faire parti des clans de La Meute, faire parti de la meute publique ne suffit pas. Ils vous faut absolument faire parti de la meute secrète, car vous ne serrez pas accepter.

Ne chercher pas à accéder à tout les Clans mais seulement celui de votre régions svp.

Image 4 demonstrates a common type of post on *La Meute*'s Facebook page that invites and pressures the group's members to request to join the private *La Meute* page. They state that the public page "is not enough" and that "you have to be part of the secret" page. These types of posts are nonexistent on DN's public page. Even though both groups have private pages, *La Meute* uses many posts to convey the message that: in order to *really* be a member, you must join our private page. This demonstrates the largely secretive and non-public sentiment of *La Meute* compared to DN.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation:

Attention

I would like to bring to your attention, dear members of the public page, that if you want to be part of the pack clans, the public pack is not enough. You have to be part of the secret Pack, which you must accept.

Do not seek access to all clans but only that of your region please.

P.S. If you are accepted in your clan watch to stay in the secret Pack, for we hold the list of members and we remove clans from anyone who is no longer in the pack.

P.S. 2. This is for the Quebec Pack only.

Thank you!!!

**Image 5: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from October 8, 2017**



It is interesting to note that many of *La Meute*'s posts contain multiple grammatical and spelling errors. The reasons for the errors is unknown but could be that the poster was careless, the poster is not educated on the correct grammar rules, or that the poster is purposefully making them in order to connect with a certain online audience. However, considering the language and style of these posts, many seem to be written as a quick, emotionally-filled response. The nature of the group suggests that there is no editorial oversight, however, these errors would likely not turn away their following.

By using thick descriptions, we see that Image 5 depicts a clearly anti-immigrant message being spread by DN, because the image contains a woman showing a thumbs-down gesture while touching graffiti on a wall that says "Welcome Refugees." It is apparent that the woman is in disagreement with this sentiment of welcoming refugees.

### Image 6: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from August 21, 2017<sup>6</sup>



Since DN does not provide any additional text to this shared Facebook post, we can assume that DN feels the same sentiment about refugees as the woman. An interesting aspect of Image 5 is that they are sharing content from Britain First's Facebook page, a far right and ultranationalist political organization in Britain. *La Meute* rarely shares content from other far-right groups, which demonstrates DN's greater connectivity with other far-right parties than *La Meute*.

Although the post itself in Image 6 is their original content, DN is linking an article from RT about the Swedes rejecting refugee asylum seekers. The text that DN posted along with the article is congratulating the Swedes on their decision to reject asylum seekers. DN most likely shared this post, and many other similar news articles from other countries, in order to demonstrate that similarly minded individuals from around the world are acting on their beliefs

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<sup>6</sup> Translation:  
0 Tolerance! Congratulations to Sweden!

in order to make progress of their messages and ideas. Using perceived success stories from other countries uses these types of posts to inspire the DN Facebook page readers. DN uses the opposite to foster emotions of outrage and anger. They post links to news articles that demonstrates actions of foreign, non-far-right individuals that act not in accordance with their ideology, which are used to instill rage and action amongst their DN members.

Image 7 demonstrates an article shared by the DN Facebook page, examines Calais, France in the aftermath of removing a tent-like village of refugees who were attempting to enter the United Kingdom. The article by RT News speaks about clashes between fifty migrants and the police. DN is likely sharing this article in order to incite outrage amongst its readers and to paint the refugees in a negative and violent light. According to *Media Bias/Fact Check*, RT News has a right-center bias and although it publishes “factual information,” it “utilizes loaded words...to favor conservative causes” by “using appeal to emotion or stereotypes” (“RT News”).

### **Image 7: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from September 2, 2017**



The fact that DN often shares from RT contributes to an echo chamber affect by only selecting sources that confirm their viewpoints.

In the posts by DN that mention other countries, there is a large sense of camaraderie and collectiveness that demonstrates recognition of similarities amongst countries. This phenomenon is not seen with *La Meute*.

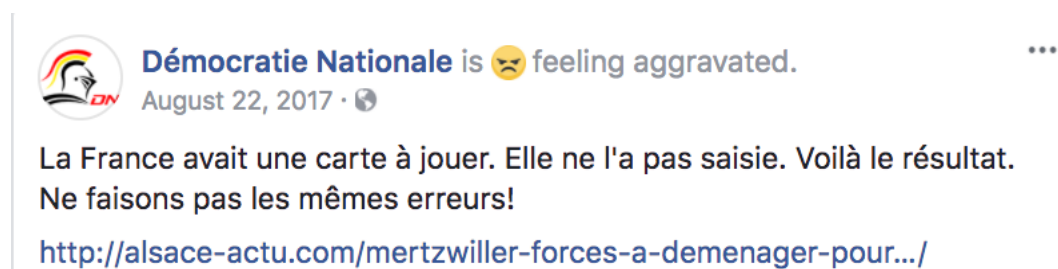
Image 8 demonstrates this camaraderie by applauding a decision of increased border security in Hungary. DN writes, “Congratulations to our Hungarian friends.” The mentioning of “friends” indicates recognition of European unity with Hungary. By congratulating Hungary and referring to them as their friends, DN projects to their followers that they are on the winning side with Hungary in order to boost their perceived successes. This tactic was never seen with *La Meute*.

#### Image 8: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from August 23, 2017<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Translation:  
Congratulations to our Hungarian friends!

**Image 9: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from August 22, 2017<sup>8</sup>**



Although Image 9 criticizes France for decisions that they made regarding immigration, *Démocratie Nationale* writes, “Let us not make the same errors.” This wording evokes a sentiment that they realize they are similar to France and have enough shared qualities that they perceive themselves to be at risk in similar situations. Posts like this one demonstrate that DN views other countries to be in the same class as them, and something that is an issue for another country could also be an issue for them. This sentiment continues the idea of interconnectivity. However, unlike Image 8, Image 9 has no mention of our French *friends* or anything similar. When DN is praising another country, they often refer to them as friends, comrades, or other terms of endearment. These actions help *Démocratie Nationale* unify the far-right groups and treat them as similar, rather than remain isolated from each other in their respective regions or countries.

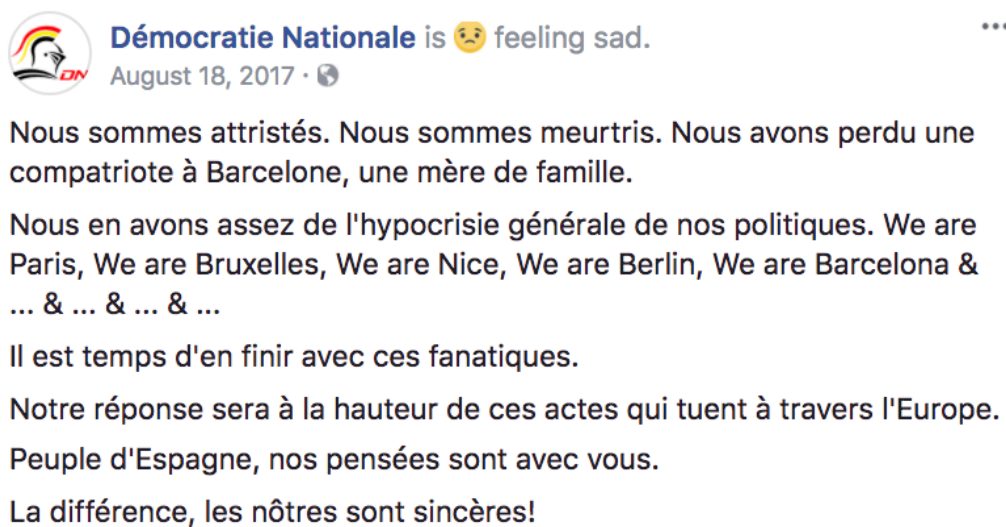
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<sup>8</sup> Translation:

France had a card to play. They did not do it. This is the result. Let's not make the same mistakes!



**Image 10: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from August 18, 2017<sup>9</sup>**



After the 2017 Barcelona attacks, DN posts (Image 10) about their sympathies and states, “We are Paris, We are Bruxelles [Brussels], We are Nice, We are Berlin, We are Barcelona,” further demonstrating their recognition of unity amongst the Europeans. Interestingly, *La Meute* did not post anything related to the attacks in Barcelona, nor was Barcelona ever mentioned in the *La Meute* data set. This lack of acknowledgement of the attacks demonstrates the truly isolationistic and almost exclusively self-appreciation ideologies of *La Meute* in their Facebook posts.

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<sup>9</sup> Translation:

We are saddened. We're bruised. We lost a fellow countryman in Barcelona, a family mother. We have had enough of the general hypocrisy of our policies. We are Paris, we are Brussels, we are Nice, we are Berlin, we are Barcelona &... &... &... &... It's time to end these fanatics. Our response will be commensurate with those acts that kill throughout Europe. People of Spain, our thoughts are with you. The difference is that our people are sincere!



Image 11: *La Meute* Facebook Post from October 6, 2017<sup>10</sup>



Image 11 exemplifies the mutual admiration and self-appreciating mentality of *La Meute* that is pervasive in a vast amount of their posts. *La Meute*'s posts, as demonstrated in Table 2 and Image 11 do not address issues outside of their region or group. The posts often only relate to themselves in order to self-perpetuate their ideas of what it means to be a part of *La Meute*. The group rarely looks to or relates with groups outside of their Quebec/*La Meute* bubble.

The data has demonstrated that *Démocratie Nationale* is much more inclined to share information with and work with other groups as compared to *La Meute*. However, when examining the Facebook posts, one instance of *La Meute* cooperation with Storm Alliance, an anti-immigration group in Québec, was noted. On November 25, 2017, Storm Alliance and *La*

<sup>10</sup> Translation:

Be strong enough to defend yourself alone, remain authentic even if you are rejected, be wise enough to join La Meute

When the time comes. You are not alone anymore.

We are La Meute.

*Meute* “joined forces to organize a protest” for the first time (“CBC News”). The protest was arranged in order to protest the Liberal government, which they accused of being “too tolerant of the cultural practices of minorities” (“CBC News”). It is interesting to examine because of the unprecedented nature of *La Meute*’s communication and cooperation with another group. Although there exist differences between *La Meute* and Storm Alliance, the leader of Storm Alliance, said that he does not want to compete with other groups, but rather, “forge alliances with them,” because he believes that as far right groups, the “common denominator is the system” (Montpetit).

A quantitative analysis and thick descriptions used in tandem have allowed us to better differentiate the communication methods implemented by the *La Meute* and *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Groups.

## Analysis

This thesis sought to examine a few different theories and objectives related to the role of distance and communication in far-right party connectivity. The data and evidence collected in the paper present some interesting analyses and implications. 250 of the most recent Facebook posts from December 31, 2017 were analyzed through counting pre-determined keywords of all of their posts as well as using critical discourse analysis and thick descriptions of individual posts. We can use this data to derive many implications from these results and reexamine the theories. The research question uses the two cases of *La Meute* and DN in order to address a larger discussion about the European Union and how far-right parties communicate within this supranational entity.

Davey and Ebner found that far-right groups collaborate in order to achieve common goals, but they did not research what allows this global communication and how some far-right groups may have more advanced or intricate vehicles that allow this communication. “The EU Brief” demonstrated goals of the EU that result in increased integration and connectivity amongst its member states.

In analyzing these Facebook posts, it was found that *La Meute* is working in a much more isolated capacity, whereas DN is utilizing European networks in terms of sharing information. The theory that the EU has given platforms that have allowed a greater sense of unity and similitude amongst Europeans is confirmed.

Bos and Van Der Brug explain that perceived legitimacy of party leaders is needed in order to have support. As demonstrated by the sources of posting – DN use a unified approach by only posting from the DN page itself and *La Meute* uses a select few individual administrators to do the posting – both parties should have legitimacy because of perceived legitimacy of the

method in which someone is posting on the page. In other words, the group's supporters should perceive their respective party as being legitimate because either a) DN has a single poster conveying all of the information through posts (the page itself) or b) *La Meute* uses a small handful of administrators who have leadership positions in the party to do all of the posting. No analyses can be drawn about the effectiveness of having a single page posting versus multiple administrators, but, according to Bos and Van Der Brug, both pages have perceived legitimacy, since they do not allow any random individual to post.

This paper theorized that *La Meute* does not have access to a supranational system that is a vehicle for connecting them with other surrounding parties, their Facebook posts on their public page will have significantly fewer postings that reference other countries and Europe. Conversely, according to this theory, DN would utilize their interconnectivity with other parties, and thus have more posts that relate to other countries and Europe. The data confirms this theory in two ways. First, in the qualitative approach, DN posted about other countries and Europe at a higher frequency than *La Meute*. Second, thick descriptions were used to highlight DN's dialogue with other surrounding countries, which was not found in *La Meute's* posts.

This paper also theorized that the lack of connectivity of *La Meute* would result in more isolationist tactics and self-referential propaganda. The inverse would then be true for DN; they have a large connectivity network, which would result in more cooperation with other similar parties. The Facebook data confirms this theory in two ways. First, the qualitative system demonstrated that *La Meute* references themselves and their community at a much higher frequency than DN. Second, by using thick descriptions we found that *La Meute* had numerous posts that embody self-promotion of their group, which was rarely seen in DN's posts.

*La Meute* often pressures their public Facebook group members to join their private page, which is not seen in DN's public Facebook page. The nature of posting positions *La Meute* to be less in the public sphere and less accepted: perhaps more fearful of stating their views on a public platform.

As noted by Doerr, far-right parties have used fear and resentment of immigrants in order to increase their presence. This projected has supplied evidence that *La Meute* primarily focuses on Quebec-specific cases and issues in order to instill fear of foreigners. DN also uses Wallonia- and Belgian-specific cases to create this fear. However, the main differing dependent variable is that DN *also* places focus on what is happening across Europe in order to instill fear, as demonstrated by the numerous articles shared from foreign sources as well as the number of mentions of other countries and Europe in their posts. The implication of these results is that DN is using the interconnectivity of the EU in order to utilize a large sample of cases Europe-wide to demonstrate their views. This also gives more credibility to DN because as Doerr states, modernizing political discourse also increases the presence of far-right parties. DN has modernized their political discourse by benefiting from using the advancements of Facebook, such as sharing content from other groups. These results further confirm the theory that *La Meute* will reference other countries less frequently than DN and the theory that *La Meute*'s Facebook posts will contain more examples of self-referencing than DN.

Golder described that one of the grievances that creates a demand for far-right parties is modernization grievances, in which he explains the social-psychological reasoning that is "individuals who are unable to cope with rapid and fundamental societal change – the modernization losers – turn to the far right" (Golder 483). DN utilizes online communication to share and spread other far-right parties' messages, as seen by the numerous posts they share on

Facebook from other European far-right groups. It is ironic that the interconnectivity system that was created as a result of EU integration is in fact the same vehicle used by far-right parties to promote their party.

The unprecedented cooperation in November 2017 between *La Meute* and Storm Alliance would contradict a theory that says *La Meute* is acting exclusively on their own. Even with this one instance, however, *La Meute* is still working much more independently than DN, who often mentions and shares information with other groups. However, this is not to say that this rare cooperation on *La Meute*'s part should not be noted as a potential shift in their tactics.

Previous research has demonstrated in this field that far-right parties have adapted their tactics – like convergence and connectivity – in order to expand (Doerr); far-right party collaboration helps achieve common goals (Davey and Ebner); successful far-right party leadership can be at least partially credited by the creation of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality (Muis and Immerzeel) and by having members united behind a leader who embodies a common ideal (Lubbers, et al.); far-right parties appeal to a wide and diverse audience by exploiting communal grievances (Davey and Ebner); geographic proximity plays an important role between communication of different groups (Hoekman, et al.); sharing information on social media has helped far-right groups overcome *cordon sanitaire* (Littler and Feldman); and political geography affects communication networks (Kuss).

The role of the French language plays a large part in the discussion of the “us” versus “them” that is used by both groups. French is the minority language in both Canada and Belgium and is seen as a part of their culture that is already a point of contention. By using the French language almost exclusively in communication, this demonstrates that the groups are continuing

the “us” versus “them” tactic of only allowing those with knowledge of the French language to be a part of the debate.

Even though *La Meute* is a much newer far-right party than DN, both groups can be analyzed as groups in their infancy. DN had to completely re-brand themselves under a new name and logos, which increases the difficulty for previous supporters of the Belgian National Front to identify DN as the same group. Re-branding of a group might create confusion amongst far-right voters. For this reason, both groups can be perceived to be in their infancy, and thus they can be analyzed in a similar manner. Both groups are still growing and have the potential to further expand on their “us” versus “them” tactics.

The findings and visual data of this paper further demonstrate an “us” versus “them” mentality. This “us” versus “them” tactic is used to delegitimize those who are perceived to be working against their ideals. If these two groups can delegitimize counter-groups, it makes it much more difficult for outside views to persuade them of different ideals. By using the French language exclusively and painting everyone who is not them as part of the problem, they increase their power as an unchangeable group. Both groups have demonstrated that there are multiple “us’s” in their discussion. For both groups, the “us” may refer to the group itself, their region, or their country. However, with DN, they perceive the “us” as including much of Europe as well. DN is able to find commonalities in a larger “us” in order to utilize more examples of how the “them” is attacking and threatening the group, whereas *La Meute* focuses on a much smaller number of “us’s,” which is a result of a lack on interconnectivity of surrounding regions.

This paper sheds new light on how the political geography of the EU, in the case of DN, leverages on-line communication and connectivity with other EU far-right party groups, whereas

groups like *La Meute* do not utilize these cross-national sharing opportunities because of a lack of a similar political geography.

Although *La Meute* is not currently utilizing these diffusion-of-information connectivity opportunities, they have made progress in offline collaboration, in the case of the collaboration with the Soldiers of Odin. It will be interesting to see if this first step will create an increased online communication network between the two group's Facebook pages.

There were some shortcomings to this paper that need to be acknowledged. This project only looked at one EU far-right party's online activity in order to draw broader conclusions. Also, there is merit in looking at other social media platforms, as well as private Facebook groups, in order to better understand the communication of far-right parties online.

This research also only examined far-right Facebook activity in terms of political geography. It was not determined how other party families use Facebook to leverage political geography.



## Conclusion

The positive outcomes of Europeanization and the integration of Europe have often been demonstrated. While there is much evidence to support this claim, it is important to also look at possible negative consequences of this connectivity. If these EU networks allow more communication and connectivity among citizens, this should hold true for far-right parties that propagate anti-immigration and nationalistic messages. This research has confirmed this notion.

As demonstrated by this research, we have seen that there may exist some negative impacts of European integration. One of these that is highlighted is that far-right parties can also profit from the political geography resulting from European integration in order to communicate and spread their messages with other far-right parties. This research allows us to analyze some ways in which far-right parties navigate this connectivity. I have demonstrated that they use unreliable sources to prove points; they often use anecdotal cases without much, if any, scholarly research to support it. This research can be used to educate individuals about being critical readers and to not fall victim to some of these false claims. European lawmakers and leaders can discredit some of the far-right parties' arguments and attempt to use logic and critical reading to dismantle some of their faulty ideologies. Davey and Ebner warn that far-right parties will continue to increase in online platforms – which results in more offline activism – if “novel counter-strategies are not developed.” Given the implications from this paper, in order to combat the rise of far-right parties, new counter-strategies must be developed in the age of cross-national social media communication.

The EU serves as a conduit for the DN, whereas *La Meute* does not have this type of supranational entity to help diffuse information and feel connected with others. In the age of the Internet, parties can diffuse their messages across political and geographic barriers. In this study,

proximity and access to vehicles of communication – such as the EU- *should not* matter, however it still does for *La Meute*. The case of *La Meute* collaborating for the first time with another far-right party, Soldiers of Odin, might shed light on a transformation of the tactics of *La Meute*. The broader implication of this is that even if a party is not currently utilizing collaboration with other parties to diffuse their message, this research demonstrates that as the party continues, they may adopt some of these new interconnectivity tactics and find common political geography with similar minded groups.

This research has demonstrated that *La Meute* and DN both utilize an “us” versus “them” mentality when communicating with their followers. This finding is important because it can help policy-makers better address the threats that these groups might currently have or have in the future. Policy-makers can use vigilance in monitoring these groups that might someday pose greater and greater threats to their populations. Individuals in power in these two regions can work to delegitimize the arguments put forth by these far-right groups.

In an age where social networks and online communication is growing, it is important for scholars to look past just party platforms, speeches and in-person communication and recognition of other groups in their party family. Public social media postings by parties can shed light on what supporters and opponents – as well as those who do not have a stance but what to learn about a party – view on a daily basis, without ever leaving their homes. Research into private Facebook groups help uncover more of the inner-workings of far-right parties. This study only focused on what these groups convey – intentionally or not – to the public.

Identifying some of the shortcomings of this project opens the avenues for future research. Just because DN is sharing other groups’ posts does not mean that other groups were sharing DN’s posts. Evidence of mutual sharing would present a stronger conclusion about DN’s

communication in the EU far-right party political geography. Studying the sharing trends of more than one group would allow researchers to be more certain about the findings of this paper. On a similar point, *La Meute* does not share other group's posts. Therefore, a stronger argument could be made if it was demonstrated that other groups are also not sharing *La Meute*'s posts. This raises the question of mutual Facebook post sharing among far-right parties in Canada and how potential cooperation among Canadian far-right groups might lead to new insights in this field of research.

Sometimes closeness and connectivity might not always have positive repercussions. This research suggests that this is the case and provides a valid first step in looking at the interconnectivity of far-right parties. Further research will help tighten and strengthen the argument. Looking at the bigger picture of the EU and how far-right parties exploit its communication networks can give insights to legislators, other parties, and individuals about addressing these issues.

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## Appendix A: Data Collection Criteria

In order to identify the differences between the two group's Facebook posts, as well as how the data explains the communication of the parties, we must acknowledge how gauging these criteria can potentially be misleading. This discrepancy exists because of the ways in which La Meute and DN would both receive a +1 for a category, yet they are presenting information in two vastly different ways. Let us compare Image 12 and Image 13.

### Image 12: La Meute Facebook Post from September 7, 2017<sup>11</sup>




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<sup>11</sup> Translation:

When it comes from Muslims themselves...

This time we won't be able to blame the pack. Even Muslims are against the course of ECR... because it is a creation of political Islam, the fundamentalist Islam of Saudi Arabia. We're not saying that.

Please share as much as possible.



**Image 13: *Démocratie Nationale* Facebook Post from September 1, 2017<sup>12</sup>**



Image 12 is a post that shares a Facebook video in which a member of La Meute comments, “When it comes to Muslims themselves...” and continues to talk about the creation of a political Islam, which is described as “the fundamentalist Islam of Saudi Arabia.” Image 12 therefore received +1 in the category of “Mentions another Country” since Saudi Arabia is mentioned. However, this was not the original intent of the “Mention Another Country” or “Mention Europe” category. Differing from Image 12, Image 13 explains recent actions of the Hungarian Prime Minister and congratulates his actions by exclaiming, “Long live Hungary!”

<sup>12</sup> Translation:

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sent a letter to the European commission calling for 440 million Euros for protecting Europe from the flow of illegal migrants.

It costs a lot of people's mistakes! It is not Hungary that must be blamed but all those parasites that let them invade. Long Live Hungary!

Image 13 explicitly address the situation in Hungary and thus also received a +1 in the category of “Mentions Another Country.” The difference between the two posts is that Image 12 just mentions a foreign country in order to give a technical, nonessential detail in furthering a point, whereas Image 13 is using the situation in Hungary to draw similarities between Belgium and Hungary in order to further the party’s beliefs. These two examples are presented to demonstrate the differences in the ways that the La Meute post and the DN post would both qualify for +1 in “Mentions Another Country” even though La Meute is not mentioning another country in order to draw a connection with another country like DN is in their post. The reader should be cautioned that although both groups receive a +1, they do not have identical implementation of “Mentions Another Country.”